THE WORLD'S MASTERS

PICASSO

Paul G. Foster

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PABLO PICASSO

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

PABLO RUIZ, who later took his mother's name of Picasso, was born at Malaga in 1881. His father was a drawing-master. He spent his youth in Barcelona and afterwards settled in Paris.

Books dealing with the work of Picasso include :

" Picasso et la Tradition Française," W. Uhde, Editions des Quatre Chemins, Paris.

" Pablo Picasso," Oscar Schürer, Verlag von Klinkhardt & Biermann, Berlin.

" Picasso," Andre Level, Les Editions G. Cres & Cie, Paris.

" Picasso Drawings," Waldemar George, Editions des Quatre Chemins, Paris.

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PICASSO

PERHAPS it is not difficult to find something short to say about a Picasso, but it is very difficult to find something short to say about Picasso. The rich and erratic variety of his genius makes it unseizable in a few phrases. It burns with incandescent brilliance, and the lenses of his expression revolve about it as in a lighthouse, now throwing a beam out here, now there, and now obscuring it. Just when one seems to have caught the significance of one light there is a sudden darkness, and then another light flashes out and we must start all over again. Only one thing is lasting and certain : the white glow in the heart of the whole intricate paraphernalia.

And Picasso does not help us. He announces no theories ; indeed, he appears to have none, although they have sprung from him through the brushes and pens and mouths of other men in a wild exotic growth. Picasso has been made to think a great deal more over the tables of the *Rotonde*—and even the *Café Royal* in the days before—than he ever did think. But that is the fate of the artistic inventor, the original

genius. He pours out what he feels without concerning himself further ; he feels it, and that is enough. But lesser men are always afraid of their feelings, especially critics : they want theories, they must have explanations to account for these reactions. That is the tragi-comedy of criticism : it is an effort to explain the inexplicable. But since art is an effort to express the inexpressible, we may as well jog along together, critics and artists, with all our imperfections on our heads. We are hurting nobody.

We are hurting nobody : and yet strangely enough there are so many ladies and gentlemen permanently on the boil about us. The critic is respected and applauded so long as he talks, respectfully and applaudingly, about the Mighty Dead. He has at least that respite, of which the artist is deprived, for the painter whose work talks respectfully and applaudingly about the Mighty Dead is no artist. The artist expresses the present, but it is only the future that will properly judge him because then he will belong to the past.

Once upon a time there was a Great Artist called Leonardo da Vinci. *Ah, how true. We know that. Our fathers told us that.* Now there is a Great Artist called Picasso. *Oh, indeed ?*

And does he paint like Leonardo da Vinci? He does not. *Then how can he be a Great Artist? Show us his work and we will judge for ourselves since you who have specially trained yourselves to look at pictures really cannot do it properly. Is that his work? Ha! Ha! Ha! Gr-r-r-r. Tar and feather him. . . .*

Once upon a time there was a Great Artist called Picasso. *Ah, how true. Tell us about him again. We love to hear again what our fathers told us.* It would be difficult to find any artist of the early twentieth century who was so completely the expression of his age. His contemporaries were puzzled and worried by his quick changes in method, but we, looking back, can see how honest a confession that was on his part of the huge restlessness of his time. The artist could not keep on the rails because the world was discarding the rails. By 1929 they were even doing away with trams in England, an Edwardian symbol to which the English people had clung desperately. Western European civilisation was in a turmoil ; science, religion, philosophy, the social system, all were being questioned, destroyed, renovated, revived, clung to. There was no mass stability, no ruling faith, no Authority.

Picasso was an artist. His æsthetic sensi-

bility never ceased sending out quivering tentacles to examine whatever came its way. He was obsessed like the other type-men of his age with curiosity, and the passion to invent. Aeroplanes were unlike stage-coaches : dynamos were unlike spinning-wheels ; Einstein's Theory of Relativity was unlike the thought of the Parish Magazine in the early sixties. Why should not modern art be unlike the art of Leonardo da Vinci ? But aeroplanes and theories were modified year by year in that fast-moving age. Why should not Picasso's work in 1929 be unlike Picasso's work in 1914 ? There were those who said it should not, curious beings who found nothing nourishing but formulæ. They called Picasso unstable. How can we be expected, they said, to appreciate his work to-day when he will be doing something quite different to-morrow ? As who should say, How can we appreciate this Hospice de Beaune 1915 to-day when we know that the same host may give us Steinberger Cabinett 1921 to-morrow ?

Picasso's genius was a capacious cellar. . . .

But I must slough this prophetic soul I so incautiously put on. It is too great a strain. Let us return to 1929.

The voice of the future has told us then not

to talk easy nonsense about Picasso's too rapid changes. It is just by that quality that we should recognise him as the most vital, the most stimulating, the most modern influence in art to-day. An experimenter, an inventer, he has of course his failures. Only on the beaten track can one be secure of a regular and mediocre success.

The battlefield was ready for Picasso. The Impressionists, an army of ancient knights who had practised the use of their arms until the edges were worn off, were drawn up in the stronghold of Academicism which they had themselves but recently stormed. Cézanne had arrayed the army against them, quietly, responsibly. They were under the banners of Light and Colour : Cézanne had raised the old standard of Form.

The stronghold was battered in many places, breached and partly occupied when Picasso led up Les Jeunes for the final stroke. He caracoled ahead, singing new songs and juggling with his brilliant sword in a hundred new fantastic ways. I doubt if the old commander quite approved : but that is the way of the world.

The Gentle Reader : All this is very picturesque, Mr. Bertram. But would you please explain just what Cubism means ? I do not understand

it. I suppose it's because I'm not educated up to it.

I thought that would come soon, gentle reader. I tried to keep it off because I cannot explain what Cubism means. You must not try to understand it ; you must try to feel it. There is no question of education but of releasing your sensibility to form, if you have any. It is really very simple. Nobody can explain why Hospice de Beaune 1915 tastes better than Australian Burgundy : nobody can explain why Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony sounds better than Sonny Boy. We can talk round about these things but we cannot explain them, because their language is not the language of words, nor is it susceptible of being translated into thought. Cubism is merely an effort to express the reactions of the sensibility to external objects in the pure abstract language of form. We do not find Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony to be a succession of farm-yard noises and so we need not expect to find Picasso's Nude is necessarily a replica of a naked human being, or even anything like a naked human being. He is striving in these abstract pictures to put into direct formal expression what he experiences *after* contemplating a relationship of natural forms. *Picasso ne cherche pas à arriver à l'objet,*

Maurice Raynal has written, *il part de l'objet.* He is a creator : he does not make a copy or even a version of something that has existed before : he makes something new. These abstract pictures of his must simply be looked at as objects in themselves without reference to life. We do not complain of St. Paul's Cathedral that it is unlike St. Paul. We accept it as a thing in itself. Why in the name of all that is logical and simple may not a painter construct an abstract design in paint, if Wren might construct it in stone ?

It is a very strange thing that the language of abstract form may be freely employed in clay or stone, textile or wood, and be widely understood, its right of existence never questioned. But because Picasso, his fellow-workers and his followers, have dared to make the little step of speaking that language in paint, they are misunderstood and abused as only inventive artists can be. I do not think even the pioneers of aviation were so mocked at as the Cubists were.

The Ungentle Reader : And still are. And quite right, too. They have diseased minds. It's only because they don't know how to draw properly.

Shame on your ignorance, Major. Picasso

won a Beaux Arts medal at fourteen. And look at those early works of his, those tender gaunt huddled figures by the illimitable sea. He could express the familiar sentiments well enough, but he grew tired of the familiar sentiments. What has been done, has been done. Is it diseased to seek after new things, to try to do what has not been done? If you honestly think he has failed, respect the splendour of his failure, but do not shame yourself by mocking. After all, Everest has not been climbed yet, but do you mock the effort?

Long ago in Holland, Vermeer van Delft very often simplified curves into angular planes. He was interested in finding the geometric structure which lay under the accidents of appearance. His lesson was forgotten as the great Florentine lesson was forgotten in the wild search after the true rendering of those accidents of appearance. The Impressionists sacrified everything to Light and Colour for their own sakes. Cézanne used their discoveries to express Form once more. He built with planes of colour. Picasso carried this further. First, he emphasised the planes for all to see, and then he simply painted the planes for their own sakes.

This effort seems to have been too high, too ambitious. Man's reaction to abstract form is

still undeveloped, and Picasso began to introduce elements of representation, memoria as it were of the objects that set him going, rather as Beethoven introduced the sound of the cuckoo in the Pastoral symphony. This is the character of most modern Cubism, abstract form combined with stylised elements of representational form. These elements are to make things easier, to direct the receptive imagination of the spectator into the right channel.

Picasso does not claim that Cubism replaces other methods of artistic expression. He has himself mainly returned to more traditional paths. He has simply added one new instrument to the artists' equipment, but that alone, in these latter days when so much has been already invented, is an achievement which assures him of immortality.

ANTHONY BERTRAM.

PLATE I

"Self Portrait," 1904

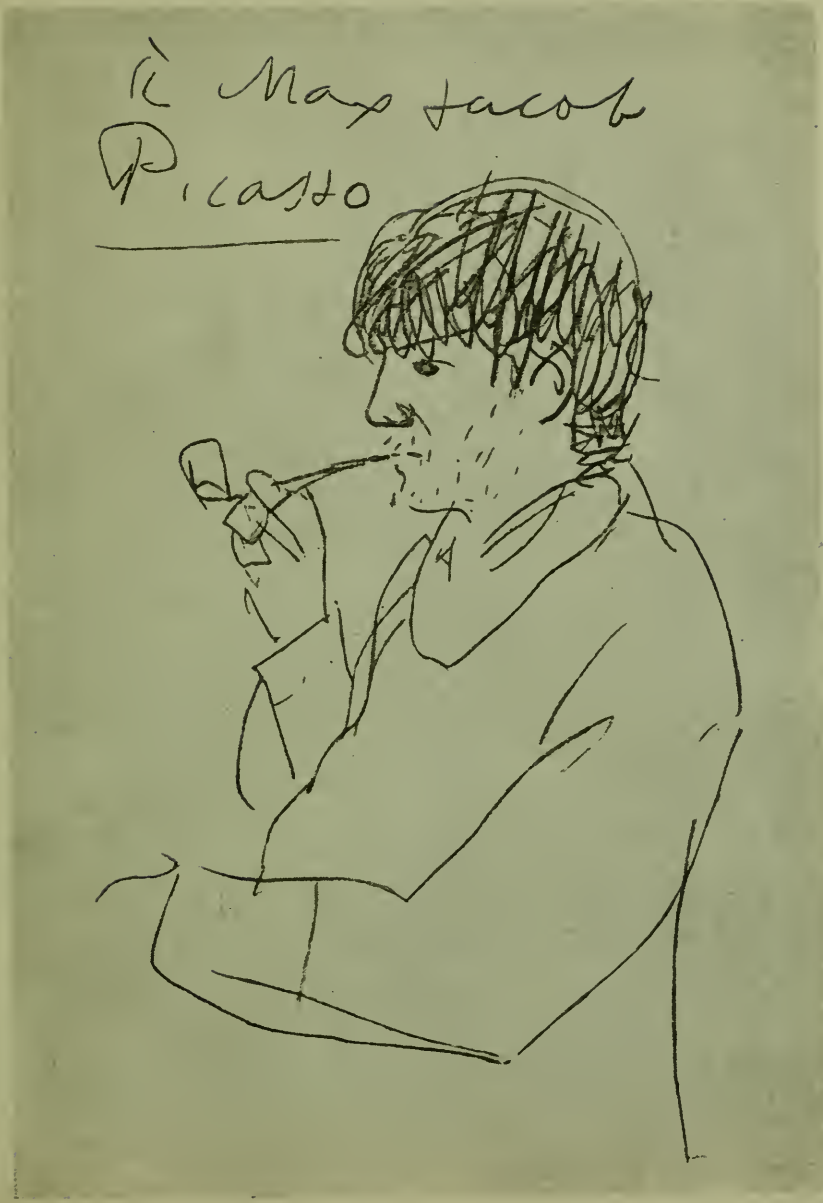
À Max Jacob
Picasso

PLATE II

"The Jugglers," 1904

PLATE III

" Head of a Woman," 1906

PLATE IV
"Outcasts," 1906

PLATE V

"Figure," 1912

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE VI

" Harlequins," 1918

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE VII

" Landscape," 1919

PLATE VIII

"The Reapers," 1919

PLATE IX

"Harlequin playing the Guitar," 1919

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE X

"The Abduction," 1920

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XI

"Three Women at the Fountain," 1921

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XII

"Woman in Green Peignoir," 1922

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

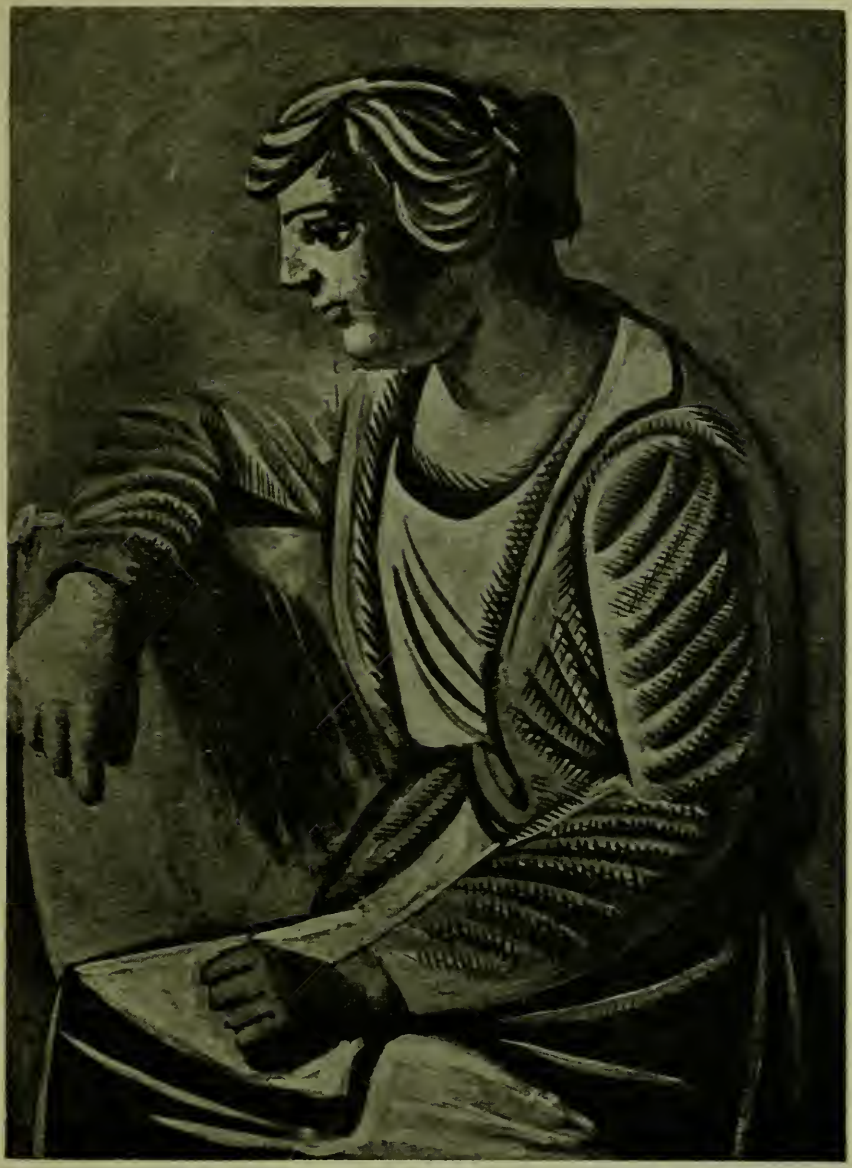

PLATE XIII

"Lady at her Toilet," 1922

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XIV

" Harlequin," 1923

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XV

"Woman Writing," 1923

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XVI

" Portrait of the Artist's Wife," 1923

PLATE XVII

"Drawing," 1923

PLATE XVIII

" At the Bull Fight "

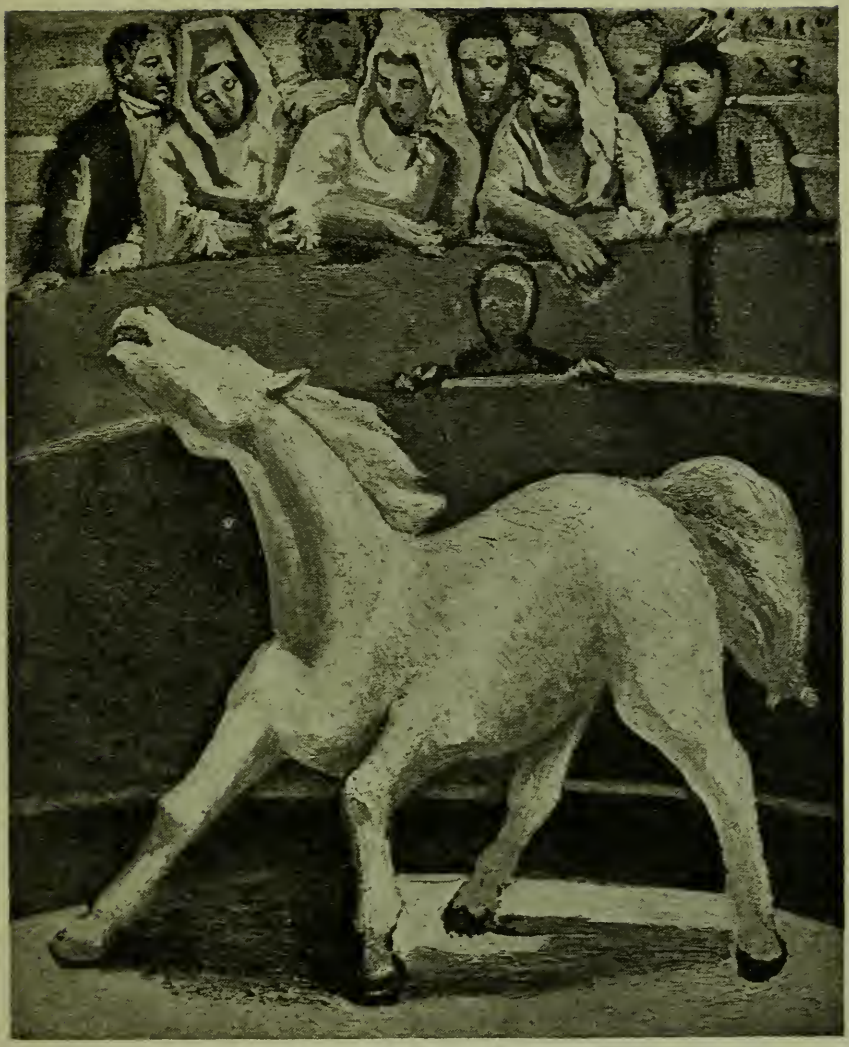

PLATE XIX
"Drawing"

PLATE XX

"Woman's Head," 1924

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XXI

"Head," 1925

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XXII

"The Drawing Lesson," 1925

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

PLATE XXIII

" Fishing Net," 1925

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

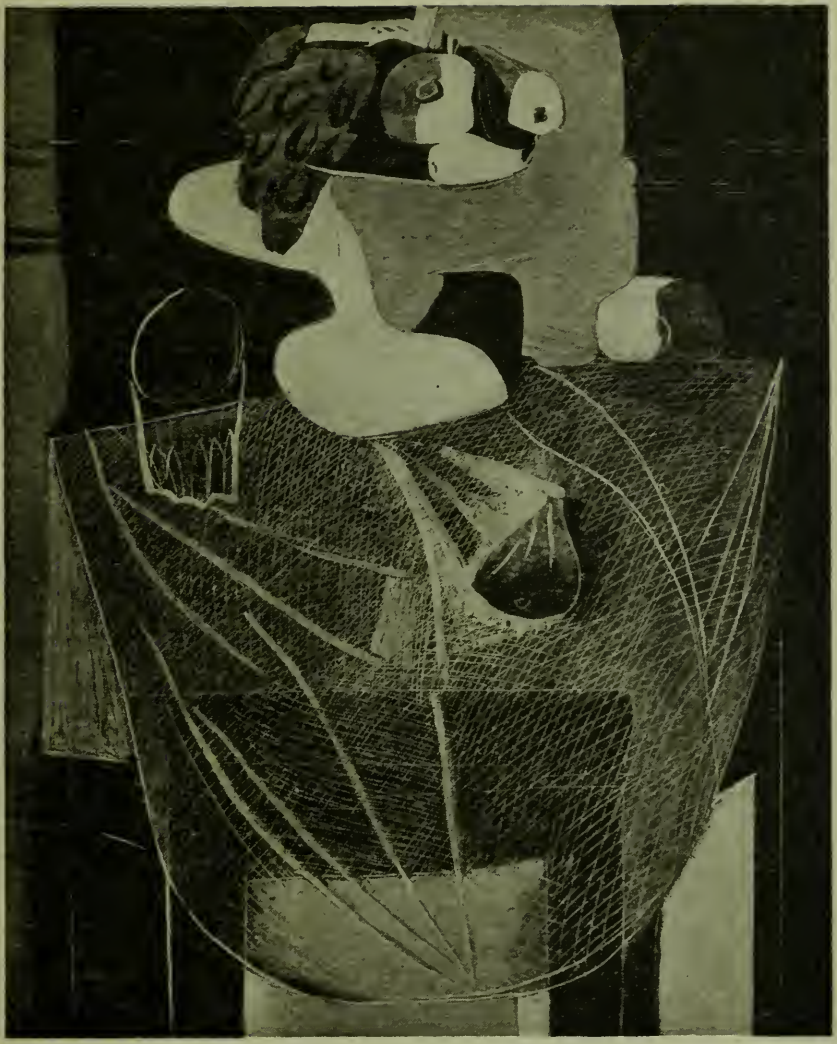

PLATE XXIV

"Lady in Arm Chair," 1927

Photograph, Paul Rosenberg, Paris

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